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SUBJECT: LEBANON: BERRI SAYS MARCH 14 SCUTTLED FRENCH
EFFORTS, ARGUES ONLY UNITED STATES CAN IMPOSE A SOLUTION

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
) .

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) French efforts produced nothing, Speaker Berri told the Ambassador, thanks to March 14's refusal to discuss Berri's latest initiative. To avoid a divided Lebanon the country needs a consensus president, Berri argued, and the opposition won't agree on a compromise candidate until it is part of a national unity government. Finally, Berri argued that only the United States can impose a solution in Lebanon and demand stability. End summary.

MARCH 14 SCUTTLED
FRENCH EFFORTS

¶2. (C) French efforts produced nothing, a notably relaxed and cheerful Speaker Nabih Berri told Ambassador Feltman and Econoff in a July 30 meeting with Berri advisors Ali Hamdan and MP Ali Bazzi. March 14, not Hizballah or Aoun, scuttled Berri's latest initiative, Berri argued. On July 28 Berri gave French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner a written proposal. Berri said he would only attend Kouchner's July 29 luncheon for National Dialogue leaders if there was a new basis for discussion. He verbally pledged that the opposition would allow Siniora to remain Prime Minister. In addition, he promised a new cabinet statement to include Paris III reforms, UNSCR 1701 commitments, the National Dialogue resolutions, unspecified economic and social guarantees, and a promise that the blocking minority would not resign. Berri produced a faxed exchange with Kouchner to show the Ambassador his pledges:

- Respect for constitutional deadlines
- Formation of a national unity cabinet with a blocking minority and a commitment not to resign
- Agreement on a president with two-thirds of the actual deputies
- Formation of committee of four to six people to immediately implement a national unity cabinet

¶3. (C) Late on July 28, after consultations with Hariri, Jumblatt, and Siniora, Kouchner told Berri his proposal was well received, and promised to raise it on July 29 at lunch. Berri faxed the proposal to General Aoun and Hizballah to ensure their agreement and that their representatives would cooperate at lunch.

¶4. (SBU) After the July 29 lunch, however, Kouchner told

Berri that the broader March 14 group had rejected his proposal and made several of its own demands, including:
--No opposition blocking minority
--A simple majority election of the president
--No national unity government until the president is elected

BERRI INSISTS ON A
CONSENSUS PRESIDENT

15. (C) Berri argued that he will not accept a divided or disturbed Lebanon, and thus insists on a consensus president. Without a national unity government, he argued, the opposition will not agree on a consensus president. (Note: Berri seems to believe that March 14 could still rally a simple majority to elect a candidate, despite the statements of several key figures in March 14 demanding a two-thirds quorum. End note.)

16. (C) Berri told us that he can wait another 20 days for progress in selecting a consensus candidate, but then will have to take action. Though the electoral session of parliament is scheduled for September 25, Berri noted that Lebanon will need at least a month of discussions before convening an election, and Berri is considering delaying the session until October 10.

ONLY US CAN RESOLVE
LEBANON'S PROBLEMS

17. (C) Berri and his team said only the United States can impose a solution in Lebanon, and demand stability. Berri noted, "I tried to do something, and (since that failed) I am

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more sure than ever that the United States doesn't want movement" beyond the impasse. After Berri and the Ambassador moved to a private side conversation to discuss potential presidential candidates, MP Ali Bazzi confided to Econoff that Berri believes only the US can impose a solution in Lebanon, by pressuring various political figures and by making it clear that violence is not acceptable.

18. (C) At the beginning of the meeting Berri noted that after his efforts failed he is more convinced than ever that the United States doesn't want to end the impasse. The next president of Lebanon will be decided by outsiders as well as Lebanese, Berri stated. It doesn't matter which political group the candidate is from, as long as he is elected by consensus. If March 14 pursues an election with a simple majority, Berri said, it means the United States wants to destroy Lebanon, because the United States controls March 14.

FELTMAN